

# Interview Techniques.

## Preparing for the medical school interview

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# Interview Purpose

The purpose of the interview for medical or other professional schools is for the admissions committee to assess your suitability as a candidate. In addition to your application documents which may have included your personal autobiographical sketch, personal statement, academic standing, and MCAT scores, the interview is another opportunity for the admissions committee to further assess different aspects of your candidacy. They may be trying to assess relevant skills such as communication, problem solving, and critical thinking, as well as your knowledge of the health care system and medical profession and any experiences that you have been involved in that have given you insights into the profession and confirmed your desire to be part of the medical community. Additionally, the admissions committee will also be evaluating your level of commitment as well as personal characteristics that will make you a suitable candidate for the role of a doctor or other health care profession roles. As such, the interview is an excellent opportunity for you as a candidate to highlight and share your skills, experiences and attributes that will make you an ideal candidate.

## Types of Interview Formats

There are different types of interview formats that you may encounter during the medical school interview process. As each school varies in its application process, it is important, when researching the various medical schools you have applied to, to understand and familiarize yourself with the interview format for each school. Below are some of the more common formats:

### Traditional or panel interviews

- This type of interview features a question and answer or conversational style meeting where you will be interviewed by one or two interviewers. Often the interviewers are faculty members and upper year medical students.
- A panel interview typically features three or more interviewers consisting of faculty members, students, and members of the community.
- Some of these interviews will be referred to as “open interviews” meaning that the interviewers have reviewed your application and are familiar with your background. Other interviews will be referred to as “closed” meaning the interviewers have not reviewed your application and have no prior knowledge of your background.

### Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMI)

- This type of interview format features the candidate moving through 8 – 10 interview stations. Each station will present the candidate with an interview question or scenario where the candidate is required to either answer a question or role play with the interviewer for a particular scenario. The timing allotted to each station is typically eight minutes with a two minute break between each station. For more information visit

- <http://www.ucalgary.ca/mdprogram/admissions/mmi/samples>

- <http://www.medicine.usask.ca/education/medical/undergrad/admissions/multiple-mini-interview-mmi-information/index.html>

### Additional interview formats

- **Computer based assessments.** One example of this is referred to as CASPer which stands for Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics currently used by McMaster Medical school, where the candidate is required to complete a 90 minute online assessment of interpersonal and decision-making skills. For more information visit <http://www.mockcasper.ca/casper-guide>.

- **Creative presentations.** Candidates may be asked to give a brief presentation demonstrating their unique and/or creative qualities.



# Pre-interview research and preparation

Given the various types of interview formats, it is important to thoroughly research and prepare for your medical school interview.

The first step of the pre-interview research and preparation process involves researching and understanding the school and program you have applied to. This includes having an understanding of the format of the interview, the types of qualities they are looking for in a candidate, as well as the specific and unique aspects of the school and program.

The second step of the process entails understanding yourself which includes understanding and identifying what specifically interests you about this program and school, your unique skills, experiences and personal qualities that will make you a good doctor, and your knowledge of current events and issues in the health care system. The more research and preparation that is conducted, the better you will be able to link and showcase your suitability for the program, school and the profession.

Here are some aspects to consider when conducting your research:

<b>The professional school and program</b>	<b>Yourself</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the format of the interview: traditional or panel, multiple mini-interview (MMI), other?</li><li>• How many people will interview you?</li><li>• What types of questions do they typically ask?</li><li>• What is the school's mission statement and values?</li><li>• What are the specifics of the program: design and structure of the curriculum, teaching hospitals, clinical terms?</li><li>• What specific program are they known for or what is unique about the school's program?</li><li>• What specific qualities are they looking for in a candidate?</li><li>• What is the environment of the school like: class size, extracurricular activities, campus resources, city attributes?</li><li>• What is the reputation of the school among current and past students?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are your specific interests in the program?</li><li>• What will make you a good doctor? (your skills, experiences, personality, and interests)</li><li>• What are your achievements, failures, and weaknesses?</li><li>• What is your knowledge of current events, controversial issues, and the health care system?</li></ul>

Once you have conducted your research, you can then move to the pre-interview preparation phase of the interview process which involves:

- anticipating questions that could be asked during the interview and preparing potential responses
- preparing questions that you would like to ask the interviewer to help you learn more about the program and the school



# Types of questions

There are numerous types of questions a medical or professional school search committee could ask you in an interview. Based on your research of the school and program, and the type of interview format the school is using, you will be better able to anticipate the types of questions you might be asked during the interview.

Typically, questions can be categorized into four main types: questions about your background; your commitment to the profession; your understanding of ethical issues; and your knowledge of the health care system and current issues.

## 1. Questions on your background

These questions will focus on your skills and experiences, your interests and values and information you have included in your autobiographical sketch and personal statement. Some sample questions include:

- Tell me about yourself?
- Discuss your clinical, volunteer, or research experiences.
- Which of your volunteer experiences have you found most valuable and why?
- Give me an example of your (...) skills. (e.g. leadership, teamwork, problem-solving, etc.)
- How would your colleagues, friends, or team members describe you?
- What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?
- What are your hobbies?
- What is your greatest achievement? Explain.
- What do you consider a failure in your life and what did you learn from the experience?
- What was a recent goal you set for yourself and how did you go about achieving it?
- What are two things you want to change about yourself?
- Which family member has influenced your life so far and why?
- Which three famous figures are you influenced by and why?
- If you could go back and change anything in your education, what would you change or do differently?
- What is your favourite book or movie?
- Tell me about a weakness you have.
- What are your strengths?

## Strategies in answering background questions—focus on...

- what makes you unique
- the skills you have gained from your experiences
- what lessons and insights you learned or gained from your experiences
- your interests
- how your qualities relate to the field of medicine
- specific examples from your past experiences to support your answer
- the **STAR** method to help you organize your examples:

Situation: briefly outline the circumstances (i.e. where and when)

Task: state the main issue, goal, task, or problem

Actions: outline the steps you took to accomplish the main goal/task or overcome the main issue/problem

Results: state what you achieved or the final outcome



## 2. Questions on your commitment

These questions will focus on determining your commitment to the program and the profession. The interview committee will explore why you chose medicine as your career; what will make you successful both during your training and as a medical professional; how you will handle challenges; and your ability to complete the program. Some sample questions include:

- Why do you want to be a doctor (as opposed to another health profession)?
- So you want to help people... why not be a teacher?
- What field of medicine interests you most?
- Why do you think you will make a good doctor?
- How do you see the role of a physician in society?
- What are the most important qualities of being a good doctor?
- What will you find most challenging about medical school? How will you handle this?
- What do you think you will like most and least about being a doctor?
- What are the negative aspects of being a doctor?
- Why should we select you over other applicants?
- Why do you want to attend our school? What do you know about us?
- What will you do if you don't get into medical school this year?
- What other schools are you applying to? What is your first choice?
- How do you deal with stress? Please share a specific example.
- How do you plan to finance your medical studies?
- How will you meet the multiple demands in your life during your medical studies?
- What is the toughest decision you have had to make?
- Where do you see yourself in 15 years?
- How will you know after you have completed the program that you will be a good doctor?
- What would your friends identify as your three worst qualities?
- Give an example of a time when you have had to handle a conflict while working in a group.
- What changes would you make to medicine in the future?
- What three personal qualities would a leader need in order to be effective?
- What do you expect to gain from this school? What do you think you might be able to give to this school?
- What major influences in your life led to your decision to pursue medicine?
- Describe yourself in three words.
- How would you handle being around sick people all the time?
- After graduating from medical school you learn that as a doctor you may only earn \$50,000 a year. Do you still want to become a doctor?

### Strategies in answering commitment questions—focus on...

- specific reasons behind your decision to be a doctor and how you came to this decision
- skills and qualities necessary to be a good doctor and experiences where you have gained these
- your understanding of life in medical school: tasks, challenges, etc.
- your understanding of the life of a doctor: role, positive and negative aspects, challenges, etc.
- your knowledge of the program and school, and specific aspects that appeal to you



### 3. Questions on ethical issues

These questions will focus on assessment of ethical or moral dilemmas and controversial issues and your confidence in making decisions on these issues. Some sample questions include:

- Dr. Monet recommends homeopathic medicines to his patients. There is no scientific evidence or widely accepted theory to suggest that homeopathic medicines work, and Dr. Monet doesn't believe they do. He recommends them to patients with mild and non-specific symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, muscles aches because he believes that it will do no harm, but will give patients reassurance. Consider the ethical implications that Dr. Monet's behaviour might pose.
- Your friend has a gambling problem. He is asking you to borrow money. What do you do?
- Because of the desire to promote a healthy lifestyle, it has been suggested that medical schools preferentially admit students who commit to abstaining from smoking. Discuss the ethical issues surrounding this policy.
- Mr. John Smith has served seven years of his 10-year sentence in prison as a convicted pedophile. He is a repeat offender. There is controversial research information on whether or not such offenders can be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. It has been suggested that his information be provided to the media and the public. Discuss the issues surrounding how much information should be released to the media and the public.
- A 68-year old woman has a newly discovered cancer. Her life expectancy is six months. How would you inform her?
- What are your thoughts about abortion? Euthanasia?
- Is it ethical for health care professionals to strike?
- What would you do if you saw a fellow medical student cheating on an exam?
- Would you get out of your car in a highway to help an accident victim? Exactly what would you do?
- If you find out that the professor with whom you have done research has changed some of the data before publication, what would you do?
- A patient has AIDS and tells you, as his physician, that he does not want you to tell his wife. What would you do?
- Should the federal government reinstate the death penalty?
- What do you think about organ donation from non-viable infants?
- You are a physician working at a private clinic with another doctor. You suspect that he/she has an alcohol problem and have seen him/her put patients' lives at risk. What would you do?
- How would you deal with a child whose family, for religious reasons, refused treatment for terminal cancer in favour of non-conventional alternatives?
- What do you see as some of the ethical issues the medical community will face, in the future, given the advances in medical technologies?
- Do you think that doctors and other medical professionals have a greater social responsibility in advocating for and educating the community on issues such as poverty, domestic violence etc...

#### Strategies in answering ethical questions—focus on...

- demonstrating your knowledge of ethical issues and appropriate boundaries
- showcasing your confidence in making decisions
- your ability to see both sides of an issue, formulate your opinion and back it up
- identifying what you believe and be prepared to elaborate on your reasoning



## 4. Questions on your knowledge of current issues and trends

These questions will focus on your knowledge of local, national and international health care systems, as well as the impacts of current events both social and political on these systems. Some sample questions include:

- What do you feel is wrong with the current health care system, what changes would you make and how would you make them?
- What have you recently read in the press about medical issues?
- Due to the shortage of physicians in rural communities such as those in Northern Ontario, it has been suggested that medical programs preferentially admit students who are willing to commit a three-year tenure in an under-served area upon graduation. Consider the broad implications of this policy for health and health care costs. For example, do you think this approach would be effective? At what expense?
- What can you say about the following medical and social issues (i.e. patient confidentiality, definition of death, organ donation, children's rights)?
- What is your number one environmental concern?
- Do you think medicine is becoming too impersonal with the advent of technology?
- How do you feel about a two-tier system? Do you think Ontario should fund private healthcare?
- What do you think of the doctor shortage in different parts of the country? What would you do to remedy this situation?
- How would you improve our preventative care settings?
- How would you control the cost of health care?
- How do you think medical malpractice can be reduced?
- In your view, what is the most pressing problem facing medicine today?
- How would you describe the relationship between science and medicine?
- How do you see the field of medicine changing in the next ten years? How do you see yourself fitting into those changes?
- What do you think about medical advice being available on the web?
- Compare the health care systems in the US and Canada. Which system in your opinion is most effective and why?
- What are three major health issues facing women today?
- Can you identify a topical health care issue that is unique to region ...?
- What do you see as the greatest social injustice facing the global community?
- What politicians are currently impacting medicine? Do you agree with the decisions they are making?
- Identify three political issues that you feel are of great importance in the health care field.
- If you were the Minister of Health and had access to unlimited funding for health care, what three avenues would you choose to allocate those funds to?

### Strategies in answering current issues and trends questions—focus on...

- your knowledge of current events, issues, and trends in the social, political and health care realms (locally, nationally, and internationally)
- your ability to provide opinions and recommendations on specific events and issues within these realms
- showcasing your dedication to this field and your intellectual curiosity



# Preparing questions to ask the interviewer

During the interview and typically towards the end of the interview you may have the opportunity to ask questions of the interviewers and share any concluding comments regarding your candidacy. Based on your pre-interview research, you will be prepared with a list of questions that you would like to have answered in order to show that you have researched the school and program and would like to seek additional information. As well the questions will also help you determine if this is the right school and program for you.

## Some sample questions include:

- I understand there is an opportunity for medical students to conduct their own research. Can you tell me more about the steps involved?
- How are students evaluated? Is it a grading system or a pass/fail system?
- Does your school have a mentorship program that connects first year students with upper year students, faculty members or practitioners?
- How does the school evaluate itself?
- I understand your program has a focus on ....can you tell me more about that?
- I have noticed that there is an opportunity to participate in earlier clinical rotations, can you share any student feedback about this process?

## Next Steps

As you begin to prepare for upcoming interviews, refer to this checklist to keep yourself on track.

- o Research the school and program—interview format, knowledge of the school.
- o Know yourself, and be prepared to discuss your skills, experiences, accomplishments, and interest in the field of medicine.
- o Anticipate questions that may be asked in the interview.
- o Prepare responses to questions (using the S.T.A.R. method where possible).
- o Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.
- o Prepare your attire, and any documents you may need to take with you.
- o Practice! Attend a Practice MMI Day at the Career Centre. Find details and registration at [www.cln.utoronto.ca](http://www.cln.utoronto.ca)
- o Visit the Career Centre website at [www.cln.utoronto.ca](http://www.cln.utoronto.ca) for a full list of services, workshops, tutorials, and print and online resources and e-learning modules.

